

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000147

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SUBJECT: INTERNECINE WARFARE THREATENS TO SPLIT OPPOSITION

CHP: THE VIEW FROM ISTANBUL

REF: A. ANKARA 198

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Classified By: Consul General David Arnett for Reasons 1.4(b&d)

[¶](#)1. (sbu) Summary: Republican People's Party (CHP) Chairman Deniz Baykal and Sisli Mayor Mustafa Sarigul are set for a collision course at the upcoming January 29-30 party congress. Efforts by Istanbul MP Zulfi Livaneli and CHP delegate Hursit Gunes to present themselves as compromise candidates have faltered, and other Istanbul CHP contacts are pessimistic about the party's prospects. With the opposition fragmented and unwilling to coalesce around Sarigul, Baykal appears to have the upper hand, our contacts say. But his victory will come at the cost of a further degradation of the chief opposition to ruling AJustice and Development Party (AKP), leaving AKP to become ever more over-confident than it already is. End Summary.

[¶](#)2. (sbu) The power struggle between CHP Chairman Deniz Baykal and Sisli Mayor Mustafa Sarigul and the accusations tossed back and forth by their supporters have exposed even more CHP dirty laundry over the last several weeks. Long-suppressed opposition to Baykal's leadership style and opposition strategy, frustration with corruption and drift from CHP's social democratic roots, and personal ambition on the part of assorted party members have all come to the surface. Moreover, because new party rules require candidates for party chairman to secure signatures from 20 percent (up from 5 percent) of the 1300 some-odd delegates, the campaigns by Sarigul, Livaneli, and Baykal are exacerbating divisions by forcing delegates to declare their allegiances more openly.

Views From Istanbul Insiders

[¶](#)3. (c) Damla Gurel, an Istanbul MP close to former Economy Minister Kemal Dervis, asserted to poloff that she doesn't support any of the declared candidates, sees little chance that a consensus opposition candidate will emerge, and believes the party's situation is "hopeless." Gurel dismissed Hursit Gunes as a serious contender and noted that Livaneli is widely considered to be an aloof intellectual with little party experience. Gurel added that some have also questioned his close relationship with Baykal confidante and MP Bulent Tanla (Note: She subsequently signed a petition, along with Dervis, supporting Livaneli's candidacy. End Note). As for Sarigul, Gurel said she cannot bring herself to support a man who offers nothing more than naked ambition. Remarking that Sarigul had made overtures to Dervis in meetings with her, Gurel said that Dervis had refused to meet with him. Looking forward to the congress, Gurel gave Baykal a slight advantage over Sarigul, but noted that several factors, including the candidates' speeches and their decisions on whether to put forward bloc or open lists for the party board, could be decisive.

[¶](#)4. (c) Former Istanbul CHP Chairman Mehmet Boluk, an outspoken critic of Deniz Baykal, told poloff that the party is in a "terrible situation," predicting that Baykal would turn back Sarigul's challenge easily in a head-to-head contest. Consequently, he has worked closely with other party insiders to identify a third "consensus" candidate (probably Hasan Fehmi Gunes) and to convince Sarigul to withdraw his nomination. Boluk claimed to be working closely with former CHP Chairman Altan Oymen, former CHP SecGen Ertugrul Gunay, and MPs Abdulkadir Ates, Hasan Fehmi Gunes, and others. According to Boluk, Ates has led the negotiations with Sarigul and has reported that while Sarigul is prepared to accept a consensus candidate, some of his supporters are still pushing him to challenge Baykal directly. Boluk predicted that Sarigul would eventually back down (Note: Sarigul declared his candidacy on January 27. End Note). Like Gurel, Boluk said the congress speeches would be important, but that the "open vote" format will favor Baykal. Whichever candidate wins, Boluk predicted that the party will split.

[¶](#)5. (c) Particularly downbeat about the party's prospects, former CHP Secretary General and Radikal columnist Tarhan Erdem noted that Baykal is merely the result (not the cause) of a party that has been gradually "hollowed out" over the last 30 years. Drawing from his personal efforts to reform the party in 1999-2000, Erdem concluded that CHP cannot be reformed from within and that the only ideological division

remaining for party members is whether or not one supports Baykal. Although skeptical of Sarigul's moral character and political platform, Erdem has been favorably impressed by the new "dynamic" that he has introduced into the debate by means of what Erdem calls Sarigul's gifted organization and people skills. Erdem dismissed critics who accuse Sarigul of "buying" support and cited examples of old party friends who had been inspired to volunteer to help Sarigul. Erdem predicted that Livaneli's January 28 decision to withdraw would work to Baykal's favor (i.e., Livaneli would have attracted many of Baykal's supporters) and forecast a narrow, but by no means assured, Baykal victory. Agreeing with Boluk, Erdem expected the party to split following the congress.

CHP Anti-American Rhetoric

16. (c) Gurel was sharply critical of recent anti-American remarks made by Dervis and other CHP figures and told poloff that Baykal confidante and MP Attila Emek had been circulating a paper among MPs and delegates that made spurious charges slandering and linking Dervis, Hursit Gunes, Sarigul, and the United States. Boluk, who had also received the paper, characterized it as a shallow attempt to fling mud on Baykal's opponents (Comment: and the U.S. End Comment). Erdem dismissed such remarks as cheap attempts to curry votes among the "ignorant, nationalistic" elements of the party.

Comment

17. (c) Prompted by the personal rivalry between Baykal and Sarigul, it is clear from Istanbul that the CHP crisis that will come to a head at the January 29 congress represents a decisive moment for the party. Efforts among the Baykal opposition to identify a consensus candidate appear to have failed and may force many to choose what they see as the 'lesser of evils,' setting the stage for one or more groups to break away from the party. Absent an (unlikely) last-minute compromise on a candidate who could hold the party together and pave the way for meaningful reform, we think the CHP that emerges from the upcoming congress will be weak, divided, and no real political threat to the ruling AKP, whose image has certainly not been hurt by the CHP infighting. False intimations of USG support (by Sarigul) and anti-American insinuations (by Baykal's supporters) are short-sighted attempts to score points and suggest that CHP will continue to place short-term political gains ahead of improved U.S.-Turkish relations.

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